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ABSTRACT

This document describes a program at the California School of Professional Psychology-Los Angeles that provides a three-semester sequence of group therapy courses to counseling students. In the students' final year, they are required to take an advanced clinical course titled Advanced Group Process. The course synthesizes didactic methods for teaching theory, experiential methods for developing applied clinical and interpersonal skills, and offers opportunities for self-awareness. Instructional methods include assigned readings; class discussion; weekly reaction papers; and self-evaluation of co-leadership class activities. Each component of the course makes use of reflecting teams and peer learning in-groups. The first 9 weeks consist of instruction and simulated learning group experiences. The following 9 weeks are devoted to student co-leaders conducting an in-class process learning group. During the final course period outside, students participate in a learning group. The experience gives students the opportunity to see and hear their peers conduct supervision and allows instructors to hear how the students are incorporating material presented in the class readings, lectures, and discussions on group psychotherapy. (JDM)

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• Group Therapy Training in a Doctoral Program

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INTRODUCTION

- Students at the California School of Professional Psychology – Los Angeles have the opportunity to enroll in a 3-semester sequence of Group Therapy courses. The first course is offered in the G3 year and is a one semester Group Therapy elective.

- In their final G4 year, students are required to take an advanced clinical course titled, the P900. I have taught a P900 titled Advanced Group Process for the past 7 years. The course allows students who have completed the G3 Group therapy elective to advance their skills and knowledge base in group therapy by participating in a year and one half of group therapy training prior to obtaining their doctorate degree.

- I. BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

- The course is divided up into three major components. Each component is designed to provide a developmental framework for subsequent learning:

  - P900 course synthesizes didactic methods for teaching theory, experiential methods for developing applied clinical and interpersonal skills, as well as providing opportunities for increased self-awareness (Feiner, 1998).

    - Instructional methods utilized in the course include assigned readings, class discussion, written summaries of in-class group process experiences, peer, instructor and self -evaluation of co-leader activity in class, and weekly reaction papers.
    - Students are told at the onset of class that participation with regard to self-disclosure and self-awareness is not part of their written semester evaluation for this class.
    - Students receive the instructor's e-mail address on the first day of class and make frequent use of this form of communication throughout the year to address logistic, ethical, and clinical questions which arise between classes or meetings during office hours on campus.

- Each component of the course makes use of "reflecting team" (Anderson, 1987).

- Each component's focus is on peer learning in group (Grunebaum & Solomon, 1980).

II. Segment I: COHESION BUILDING & DIDACTIC INSTRUCTION

Mini-lecture and Skill building

- The initial 9 weeks of class consist of didactic instruction and a simulated "learning group" experience designed to build group cohesion and facilitate the development of group therapy micro-skill acquisition.

- The instructor in preparation for applied activities introduces didactic material. The premise being that cognitive abilities facilitate student ability to contextualize applied experiences more thoroughly. Material is sequentially organized to maximize the accomplishment of learning objectives for each student.

- Rules, norms, and expectations for group behavior are also explicitly discussed until a consensus is reached (Yalom, 1995). Group dynamics emerge in the process of negotiating the group contract and continue to emerge throughout the course. Ground rules for safety, confidentiality, and accountability are also discussed so that a "holding environment" is created where students can learn the relational skills necessary to conduct group therapy in developmental stages.

- I also lead the class in a simulated "learning group" experience for the second half (90 min) of class each week. This portion of the class meeting time may include structured role playing, as well as spontaneous group interactions linked to the didactic material presented previously.

- A good deal of attention is devoted to developing a class environment where safety and trust allow for the respectful expression of differences and clinical challenges, as well as support, for new and emerging group therapy skills (Salvendy, 1999). We work to create a group environment where the "safe emergency" is possible. Have

everyone make an appearance, make contact between members wherever possible (Polster & Polster, 1973).

III. Segment II: C0-LEADERSHIP & REFLECTING TEAM ENVIRONMENT

- Peer supervision of group process: The next 9-week segment of class time is devoted to student co-leaders conducting an in-class process "learning group" experience with the instructor serving as a "live" consultant.

- All groups take place in a reflecting team environment and are supervised by classmates as well as the instructor.

- Large group debriefing: after a brief 15 minute break, this class segment is immediately followed by a debriefing session in which co-leaders receive multiple levels of feedback from group members, reflecting team observers, and the instructor on their co-leadership performance. The instructor facilitates a respectful discussion of clinical choices and observations.
  - Student observers are instructed in the use of a written peer evaluation form covering co-leader, group process and individual and group content issues. The form is used to convey immediate feedback to co-leaders and returned to the instructor for evaluation.
  - Student co-leaders are also required to complete a written self-assessment of their performance which is turned in to the instructor for evaluation.

IV. Segment III: CO-LEADERSHIP, PEER SUPERVISION, & MULTI-LEVEL REFLECTING TEAM

- In-class learning group: The final course period consists of inviting 5-8 outside G1 or G2 students to serve as an ongoing "learning group" for this 9-week segment.

- Student co-leaders once again rotate facilitating the group and receiving feedback and supervision from peers, and the instructor.

- Process learning group members are also invited to remain in the room during the debriefing portion of class time providing another level of reflecting team.

- As an alternative, students may elect an optional in-class group experience led by the instructor. This is followed by instructor and peer debriefing and

supervision of the group process. Typically, process and theoretical issues raised in the experiential "learning group" portion of class will provide topics and examples for didactic instruction and training. Practical application of theories and skill building of techniques are stressed throughout this segment of the course. Students are expected to observe "learning group" dynamics based on specific lessons from the class. Throughout the course, the instructor invites and encourages class members to observe their interactive process in terms of a self-reflective loop and developmental group stages.

- The course also makes use of multiple learning modalities for teaching students about group therapy supervision including lecture and discussion, extensive use of role play, instructor demonstration, and ultimately extensive in-class review of segments of actual peer supervision experiences. This provides an *in vivo* opportunity for students to see and hear their peers conducting supervision, and for the instructor to hear first hand how the student is incorporating material presented in class readings, lecture and discussion related to group psychotherapy.

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